

As poverty and hunger grow

Congress cuts billions from food stamps

By Kathy Durkin

Sometimes life under capitalism is like an episode of “The Twilight Zone” — completely irrational.

However, recent acts of Congress are not science fiction but very real actions that will have dire consequences for millions of the poorest people in the country.

In recent weeks both houses of Congress passed a \$26 billion state fiscal aid bill. Its stated aim is to save 318,000 state and local education and health care jobs and to help fund Medicaid programs. But the bill comes with dire strings attached.

The Senate’s Republican right wing pushed hard and even filibustered to stop passage of this bill. Democrats responded by proposing a cut of \$6.7 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — the Food Stamp Program — along with other measures to offset part of the bill’s costs. When the Congressional Budget Office claimed the bill would still increase the federal deficit, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, broke the filibuster by offering to increase the cut and take \$11.9 billion from food stamps. The bill then passed.

The 2009 Recovery Act had included a 13.6 percent increase in food stamp benefits to aid workers hit by the recession. The entire Republican right opposed this \$787 billion stimulus package and has been waiting for an opportunity to undo its provisions. This new legislation will terminate the SNAP increase in April 2014, sending food stamp benefits back to 2009 pre-stimulus plan levels.

With these major cuts in place, the House agreed to the Senate’s version of this bill.

On Aug. 5, the Senate pulled a sleight-of-hand by unanimously passing the mis-named Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. While it will allegedly fund \$4.5 million for school-based child nutrition programs, this bill would cut another \$2.2 billion in food stamp benefits and move up SNAP cutbacks to November 2013.

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PHOTO: JOHNNIE STEVENS

The New York State Freedom Party announced Aug. 16 at a press conference at Brooklyn’s Borough Hall that it had collected more than 43,500 signatures on petitions nominating New York City Council member Charles Barron, Eva Doyle and Ramón Jimenez to run for governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general, respectively. About 50 people flanked Barron (at center in first row), State Assembly member Inez Barron and

campaign managers Viola Plummer and Jitu Weusi as they announced the successful conclusion of the petition drive. Only 15,000 valid signatures are required for ballot status. This grassroots movement was reflected in the volunteers who had packed the campaign headquarters in Brooklyn. As Plummer put it at the press conference, “They have capital, money, but we have labor, people.”

— Bill Cecil

EDITORIAL

Welcome back, FIDEL

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WW PHOTO: JOHN CATALINOTTO

Welcome back, Fidel!

This August saw a happy birthday anniversary for Cuba, for Latin America and for the world’s working and oppressed peoples. Fidel Castro is back. He is back with vigor, as one can see from his return to the television screen with appearances before the Cuban National Assembly.

This is also great news for the many in the United States who were and are inspired by the Cuban Revolution, its successes, its contributions to international solidarity and to the liberation of peoples all over the world. Fidel has long been its leader and symbol.

In his youth, Fidel was the consummate revolutionary, the bearded guerrilla fighter who with other selfless revolutionaries led his people to free themselves from Yankee domination. For more than 40 years he served as head of state of embattled socialist Cuba, surviving the period after the disappearance of the Soviet Union when all his imperialist enemies — the CIA had tried many times to murder him — expected him to be pushed off the stage of world history.

Four years ago he fell ill with an intestinal disease that was obviously life threatening and debilitating. His contributions during the next four years were limited to occasional published “reflections” regarding world events and meetings with political leaders like Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. His writings focused the world’s attention on the dangers of global warming and other

attacks on the environment, something Fidel had been warning about since the 1990s.

Now he is back and in a new role. He has stepped aside from the day-to-day running of the country — now in the hands of Raúl Castro — and is commenting on world events from a position unmatched in experience, prestige and consistency by any of the so-called political leaders of world imperialism.

He is warning the world of the possibility that the U.S. will unleash a nuclear war if it carries out or supports a military attack on Iran. And he is keeping up his warnings about the dangers from environmental degradation, which at root are dangers of unchecked capitalism.

For the Cubans, Castro’s return is a joy and a testament to the resilience and endurance of their political leader. His return is a symbol, too, of the resilience of the Cuban Revolution in a world that U.S. imperialism makes perilous for the nearby island.

It is also a tribute to Cuba’s socialist medical system. While Cuba’s high-quality public and primary health care has made it the model for the non-imperialist world, it also provides the high-tech, specialized medical care that extends the lives of those facing severe challenges. In this, too, Fidel’s return to health is a symbol of the successes of the Cuban Revolution.

Congratulations, Fidel! Welcome back. □

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Congress cuts food stamps

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The funds for this bill were supposed to come from farm conservation programs, but right-wing senators, acting for the livestock industry, objected.

The House hasn’t yet voted on this bill, which will supposedly help provide nutritious school lunches. However, the cutbacks that are also part of the bill will deny poor children food for their meals at home, refuse meals to entire families, and harm the nutrition and health of millions. Fifty congresspeople and many progressive groups, such as food program advocates, are opposing this legislation.

Combined, these bills would gut the SNAP program by \$14.1 billion and be the first time Congress has voted to cut food stamps. The Food Research and Action Center says that the passage of both bills would reduce a family of four’s food stamp benefits by \$59 per month, starting in November 2013. (frac.org)

Food stamps are a lifeline for many low-income workers and their families, including single mothers. Eighty percent of the funds go to families with children. The benefits are vital during this recession, with 30 million people officially unemployed or underemployed, and many more jobless not even counted.

Nationwide, a record 40.8 million people — one in every eight — currently receive SNAP benefits. In poorer states the number is one in five or six. There are 6.4 million more people on this program than one year ago. For many, this is their only income. The meager allotments average \$140 a month or \$4.50 per person per day.

While millions are hungry, it is devious and cruel for Congress to use the Food Stamp Program as an ATM to

fund other programs. It is callous to pit teachers’ salaries against medical care and food programs for poor people, and it is unnecessary to do this.

Moreover, this shows the brutality of the capitalist government, which is more than willing to take away workers’ and poor people’s benefits and to create competition among them, when they all deserve funding.

This kind of legislation is aimed at pitting teachers and others also facing job cuts against those working-class families in the direst need. It is intended to undermine working-class solidarity. The government can and should fund jobs programs, health care services, public schools and food assistance benefits for everyone who needs them. The money is there.

Somehow, Congress found \$1 trillion to bail out the banks. Somehow, Congress will find \$850 billion to pay for the looming, gargantuan military budget. Congress helps the superrich and aids the corporations, which are again raking in megaprofits, by giving them tax loopholes like the Bush-era tax cuts for the rich.

This is not just an issue of bad legislation. It’s much bigger than legislation alone. The budget priorities and allocations that enrich the superwealthy, the banks and corporations at the expense of the workers and poor show that the government, including Congress, serves the interests of the capitalist class, not the people.

What’s needed to push this back is a mass struggle for funding for jobs, health care and food assistance for all. Labor unions and all progressive organizations and activists should join together, surround the Capitol and present comprehensive demands addressing all these needs. □

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A sign of the times

30,000 wait in scorching heat for housing vouchers

By Dianne Mathiowetz
Atlanta

It merited the evening news, not just in Atlanta but nationally.

Contradicting all the pundits who were opining on the “positive” economic outlook came the startling video of thousands of people standing in long lines that stretched around an East Point, Ga., strip mall parking lot. A predominantly Black suburb of Atlanta in south Fulton County, East Point has about 40,000 residents.

On Aug. 11, in scorching heat, a crowd of 30,000 — mostly women of all ages, many accompanied by children, some using walkers or in wheelchairs — waited for hours in hopes of securing an application for a Section 8 housing voucher. Dozens had actually been camping in front of the East Point Housing Authority building for more than two days just to be sure they would be among the first to get one of the forms.

To make matters worse, the East Point Housing Authority has no funding for any new vouchers now. Those fortunate enough to get through the red tape can expect to be on a waiting list for years.

The story is the same throughout metro Atlanta. Although about 15,000 Georgia

residents receive federal subsidies under the Section 8 program that they can use to secure privately owned housing anywhere, thousands more have qualified but remain on waiting lists. Most metro agencies have not even opened their application process in more than two years. This was the first time since 2002 that East Point was taking new names.

Over the last decade, Atlanta has demolished all its large public housing stock, including some senior high-rises, eliminating thousands of low-cost housing units. Once these publicly funded assets were torn down, private developers were allowed to build so-called “mixed” housing, in which most of the apartments rent for market rates and only a small handful are considered “affordable.”

The former tenants of public housing projects — including Bowen, Grady, Capitol Homes, Hollywood and Bankhead Courts — were supplied with Section 8 vouchers and told to find a private landlord willing to rent to them. Many of these families lost their vouchers because they could not pay the skyrocketing utility bills resulting from unusually severe weather. Others have been victimized again by landlords who fail to pay the mortgage and the renters end up getting evicted.

The housing crisis is also exacerbated by Georgia’s unemployment rate, which is higher than the national average. Atlanta’s rate is higher still — more than 10 percent. Recent studies show that while per capita income nationally went down 2.8 percent from 2008 to 2009, in metro Atlanta it dropped 4.8 percent.

Metro Atlanta also ranks among the top areas for foreclosures. On Aug. 3, more than 9,000 foreclosed properties were scheduled to be auctioned off on various courthouse steps, from Gwinnett to DeKalb counties. All these factors combine to create great demand for a shrinking supply of decent, affordable housing.

Throw in unchecked gentrification of in-town neighborhoods, with business-driven legislation dominating public policy decisions, and the sense of desperation and hope that caused 30,000 low-income people to try to improve living conditions for themselves and their families, even if it meant standing in the blazing sun for hours, becomes understandable.

Women interviewed by local media all expressed how hard it was for them to afford a safe place to live on their wages, disability or Social Security checks. Each held out hope that with some help, they could make it. All said that whatever

they had gone through that day would be worth it if they could get a voucher.

Equipped with riot gear, police from several jurisdictions were called in to control the crowd. Watching the news coverage, one sees the similarities to other recent catastrophic events such as those in Haiti, Pakistan and New Orleans, where the dire need of the people is met with armed police who enforce “order” but don’t facilitate justice.

The scene became more chaotic as police began moving people from one place to another, causing some to lose their place in line and adding to their feelings of frustration and anxiety. Sixty-two people suffered some type of injury, with more than 20 people taken to hospitals because of heat-related distress.

Unable to handle the volume, the East Point Housing Authority finally gave stacks of applications to police, who stood on their cars and distributed forms hastily to a sea of outstretched hands. Some 13,000 applications were passed out. The lucky recipients have until Aug. 31 to return them with all the required information.

If their application checks out, then they get to wait again — this time maybe for years. □

Students confront candidates on ethnic studies

By Paul Teitelbaum
Tucson, Ariz.

Candidates for the post of Arizona state superintendent of schools faced a packed auditorium at a local high school during a public forum on Aug. 12. The superintendent of schools position has taken on special importance here with the draconian cuts to the education budget and a vicious attack on ethnic studies.

It was the current superintendent, Tom Horne, who launched the attack on Tucson’s Ethnic Studies Program in 2006 that resulted in the passing of racist law HB2281, which outlaws ethnic studies in Arizona. Horne is now campaigning to be Arizona’s attorney general, a step many see as a precursor to a gubernatorial bid.

Among the five candidates vying to replace Horne is state Sen. John Huppenthal, a rabid, anti-immigrant racist and supporter of Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Huppenthal collaborated with state Sen. Russell Pearce to push through legislation like SB1070, which attacks immigrant workers, and HB2281. He consistently voted for cuts to public education and for expansion of privately run charter schools. Huppenthal’s move to fill Horne’s position presents a continuing danger to Arizona students, especially students of color.

The front rows of the auditorium were filled with students and alumni of Tucson’s ethnic studies program, who had come to defend their program and counter the lies they knew these candidates would be spewing.

When the forum began, the moderator stated that no one would be allowed to speak except the candidates; all questions must be submitted in advance and would be read by the moderator with each candidate given an opportunity to answer.

Although angry with this format, ethnic studies students submitted dozens of questions and waited for the forum moderator to ask their questions.

After 90 minutes of superfluous posturing by candidates, a vague question about ethnic studies was read that elicited vague responses from three of the candidates. Margaret Dugan, Horne’s assistant superintendent of schools, defended the closing of ethnic studies, citing some need for students to “assimilate.” Huppenthal proceeded to slander the program, talking about classes that separate students by ethnicity and teach students to hate.

Having been denied the right to speak and having heard enough of Huppenthal’s lies, a group of students yelling, “Freedom of speech!” and “Hands off ethnic studies!” forced their way into the auditorium with two large banners that read, “Money for Education, Not Border Militarization!” and “Defend Ethnic Studies! No to HB2281!”

Although there was a brief skirmish as some attendees tried to keep the banners out, this was a public forum and these protesters had the right to be there. This militant action brought a quick end to the racist lies sputtered by Huppenthal.

The students and banners remained in the auditorium. The meeting was called to a close and many people stayed around to talk with the students and other protesters about the attacks on ethnic studies and the education budget.

The local media, in their brief coverage of the action, referred to the students as disrespectful hooligans. But last year, when the Tea Party bigots burst in on Town Hall meetings on health care, they were characterized as “patriots.”

On this same day, Congress presented the Obama administration with a \$600-million “border security” appro-



PHOTO: DAVID ABIE MORALES

Banner says: ‘\$ for Education, Not Border Militarization!’

priations package, HR6080. President Barack Obama signed the bill the following morning. This money, which should

be allocated for education, will be used to further militarize the Arizona-Mexico border. □

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Capitalism offers no solutions as so-called recovery falters

By Jaimeson Champion

The steady stream of dismal economic reports released in recent weeks has even the most persistent optimists on Wall Street doubting the strength of the so-called economic recovery. Current statistics showing sharp rises in first-time jobless claims and a dramatic widening of the trade deficit have sent many institutional investors running for cover amid heightened fears of a “double-dip” recession.

“People are dumping stocks because they’re afraid earnings will decelerate and the economy is losing steam,” said James Swanson, chief investment strategist at MFS Investment Management. (Businessweek, Aug. 12)

A 265-point drop in the stock market on Aug. 11 was yet another indication that many of those who once saw “green shoots” are now increasingly recognizing the rot of this wilting recovery.

The following day, Aug. 12, more than 100 unemployed workers known as “99ers” gathered outside the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street to demand the extension of unemployment benefits. 99ers are workers who have exhausted the 99 weeks of federal unemployment benefits. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 1.4 million workers in the U.S. have been without a job for more than 99 weeks — and this doesn’t count the millions who have never been able to get a job or who

have given up looking and are classified as “discouraged workers.”

The 99ers demonstrating outside the stock exchange conveyed heartbreaking stories of long, fruitless job searches that were followed by repossession, foreclosure and homelessness.

In many ways the events on Wall Street those two days were a microcosm of the way this so-called economic recovery has been experienced in the U.S. Inside the halls of high finance, the well-heeled bankers and investors traded stock and debated whether or not the health of the recovery was diminishing. As the recipients of hundreds of billions of dollars of bailout funds, these wealthy bankers and investors did experience a recovery — a recovery to their profits and dividends.

But outside the highly guarded doors of the New York Stock Exchange, the 99ers gathered to demand benefits that are essential to their basic survival. The 99ers do not need Wall Street prognosticators and profiteers to tell them that the recovery is losing steam. They are painfully well aware of the fact that, for them, the recovery never began. For the 99ers and tens of millions of other unemployed and underemployed workers in the U.S., the economic recovery has always been a mirage. Talk of a rebound has always rung hollow to the tens of millions of workers, and their families, who have lost their jobs, their homes and their way of life in this unceasing economic nightmare.

The Fed’s new/old fix

Following its most recent meeting on Aug. 10, the Federal Reserve Open Market Committee stated that “the pace of recovery in output and employment has slowed in recent months.” In response, the Fed unveiled plans to begin another round of “quantitative easing” by purchasing additional U.S. Treasury bonds.

To put the Fed’s new plan in context, it is necessary to first briefly revisit the central bank’s actions over the past two and a half years.

As the Great Recession began to take root in late 2007, the Federal Reserve employed its traditional recession-fighting tool of slashing interest rates in efforts to increase the money supply and flood the glutted markets with liquidity. But by the fall of 2008, with the federal funds interest rate already near zero and the crisis continuing to deepen, the Fed increasingly turned to more nontraditional policy measures. These measures included printing hundreds of billions of dollars to purchase failing mortgage-backed securities and other toxic assets from the big banks and Wall Street firms.

By early 2010 the Federal Reserve had already handed out more than \$1.25 trillion to the big banks in the form of massive purchases of these mortgage-backed securities.

Citing signs of economic recovery and wary of the potential inflationary impact of printing more than \$1.25 trillion, the

Fed stopped its purchases of mortgage-backed securities in March 2010. “I think the economy is starting its recovery, and there’s reason to be optimistic,” declared Thomas Hoenig, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. (Wall Street Journal, Jan. 8)

But with mounting evidence indicating that the recovery never took root, the Federal Reserve has dropped the façade of an economy on the mend and is returning to its bag of monetary tricks. It now plans on making monthly purchases of tens of billions of dollars of U.S. Treasury debt in further attempts to inject liquidity into the markets and stabilize the markets. So essentially, after two and a half years, the Fed’s new prescription is for more of the same.

Workers have the answer

In response to the loss of tens of millions of jobs and the shuttering of entire industries, the Federal Reserve, which is legislatively mandated to pursue full employment and price stability, has answered by handing out more than \$1.25 trillion to bankers.

In response to economic despair and human suffering not seen since the Great Depression, the ruling-class politicians have answered with budget cuts to social programs, school closings and further reductions to affordable housing.

At every nightmarish turn in this continuing economic disaster, the ruling-class policymakers and politicians have proven that they have no solutions to the problems faced by the working class. The supposed government of the people, by the people and for the people has proven itself to be a government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich.

The working class must unite in its own common class interests and advance its own solutions. The answers to the problems created by this crisis lie not in the brains of bourgeois economists but rather in the bonds of solidarity being formed among workers like the 99ers. With every grassroots convergence of workers, the strength to combat this rotten system becomes fortified. With every unified demand advanced by the working class, the solution to this economic crisis gets a little bit closer. □

99ers protest cutoff of benefits

New York — Chants of “We want jobs!” rang out at the corner of Wall and Broad streets in the shadow of the Stock Exchange at noon on Aug. 12 as the “99ers” made their first appearance in struggle in the streets.

The name refers to workers who have been jobless for so long that their unemployment benefits have run out after they received 99 weeks of payments. Many had been working for decades before they were laid off in 2007 or 2008 as the economic crisis took hold.

More than 100 such unemployed workers and their supporters answered an Internet call posted by Kian Frederick — who chaired the rally — and the three other founders of the group, themselves all 99ers. They set up an Internet website and started communicating among themselves and working to get favorable publicity for legislation extending benefits. There is a bill before the U.S. Senate to provide another extension of unemployment benefits — Tier 5 — to states where the official unemployment rate is greater than 7.5 percent.

Most of the participants were meeting each other for the first time at the protest. Nevertheless, there was an obvious sense of solidarity among the assembled unemployed workers, whatever their individual situations. Frederick said that 66 of the 100 attending the protest were unemployed people who signed up to be on the group’s mailing list.

According to the comments and slogans at the protest, most need an extension of benefits but would prefer to find a steady job at decent pay. “We need a Tier 5 to survive,” “A job is a right” and “Jobs or income now” were among the slogans. A delegation from the Professional Staff



Congress, representing CUNY teachers and other workers, held a banner at the protest.

Some of those attending the protest expressed the hope that this movement can spread beyond its initial Internet success

to reach into areas of the country with the highest unemployment and not only win greater jobless benefits but also launch a struggle to provide jobs for millions.

— Report and photo
by John Catalinotto

Flight attendant says ‘Take this job and shove it’

By Paul Wilcox

One thing the superrich hope to gain from high unemployment is a grateful and submissive working class. They hope those still working will feel so privileged and thankful to have a job that they’ll do anything to keep it — doing extra work to make up for those laid off, accepting cutbacks in wages and benefits, and being generally happy and compliant doing whatever is demanded of them on the job.

But flight attendant Steven Slater, by his inspiring actions Aug. 9 aboard a Jet-Blue aircraft, broke this fantasy and expressed the feelings of millions of workers who don’t feel so lucky being taken for granted and abused by their employers, or by anyone.

Slater, after reportedly being cursed over and over by several abusive passengers and slammed on the head with an

In grip of economic crisis

Michigan struggles focus on racism, police brutality

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

The economic crisis has hit the workers in Michigan, a state of heavy industry, especially hard, and has also brought with it an intensified struggle against racism. These brief reports cover three different areas of the state.

March in Benton Harbor slams land grab

More than 100 people rallied and marched through the southwest Michigan city of Benton Harbor on Aug. 10 to protest the opening of the Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course. The course is located on Lake Michigan in part of Jean Klock Park, land that was deeded decades ago for use by the African-American working-class community. The course was built on a part of the park now known as Harbor Shores, where, in addition to the golf course, there are plans to construct expensive condominiums.

The Nicklaus Signature Golf Course will host the PGA Sr. Championships for both 2012 and 2014. Benton Harbor, a majority African-American city, has been devastated by the loss of jobs coupled with police repression, which sparked a four-day rebellion in 2003.

Demonstrators also blasted the Whirlpool Corporation — which is based in Benton Harbor — for its refusal to pay adequate taxes and utility costs for large-scale use of local land and resources. Whirlpool announced recently that it would build a new, world headquarters in the city, even though critics have accused the appliance manufacturing firm of not hiring local residents.

The Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of the local NAACP branch and a former political prisoner in Michigan, led the demonstration, which attracted Benton Harbor residents as well as people from around the country. The march began with a rally at City Hall and concluded with a picket at the gate of the golf course and then a speak-out in the park across from the new Harbor Shores development.



Son of slain imam speaks out, Nov. 2009. WW PHOTO: CHERYL LABASH

Those in attendance included Ralph Poynter of the Free Lynne Stewart Committee in New York; Fred Hampton Jr. of Chicago, son of slain Illinois Black Panther Party chairman, Fred Hampton; Larry Pinkney from Minneapolis and a writer for the Black Commentator; Ron Scott and Sandra Hines of the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality; as well as members of other organizations from Detroit such as the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, Workers World Party, the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice (MECAWI) and the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shut-offs.

Arrest made in serial killing of Black men

A suspect has been arrested in the investigation surrounding the stabbing deaths of five African-American men in Flint, Mich., and the wounding of at least 15 other people, including one white male. Similar attacks have taken place in Leesburg, Va., and Toledo, Ohio, where four reported assaults, none of which were fatal, took place.

The suspect arrested is a citizen of Israel and is reported to be a Christian of Arab descent. Most people who knew the suspect, including family members, expressed shock over his arrest, which occurred as he was boarding a plane to Tel Aviv.

The attacks have come as a further affront to the residents of Flint, which is one of the hardest-hit cities in Michigan as a result of the economic crisis. Even during the 1980s, Flint experienced the unprecedented closing of automotive plants that left tens of thousands of workers idle.

FOI lawsuits filed in imam's assassination

Attorneys for the Council on American-Islamic Relations of Michigan have filed several lawsuits demanding information from law-enforcement agencies on the assassination of Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah. The imam was lured by FBI informants to a warehouse in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn on Oct. 28, 2009, where he was first attacked by a dog and then shot 20 times by government agents.

The U.S. District Attorney's Office claimed in a 44-page criminal complaint that the imam and his followers at the Masjid al-Haqq on Detroit's west side were involved in the trafficking of illegal goods and advocated the violent overthrow of the government leading to the establishment of an Islamic state. People who knew the imam, including residents of the neighborhood where he worked, said that he was a dedicated community servant for the poor who provided food, shelter, job referrals and counseling to displaced workers and ex-convicts.

Since the assassination of Imam Luqman, condemnations have been voiced throughout the world. Imam Dawud Walid, executive director of the Michigan chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, recently traveled to the West African state of Mali. He told an Aug. 15 meeting of the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality that the people there were "well aware of the government killing of Imam Luqman."

Demonstrations against the FBI were held in the immediate aftermath of the assassination by MECAWI and the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality in November 2009. MECAWI described the killing of the imam as a targeted assassination.

Various organizations and officials have called for an independent investigation of Imam Luqman's killing, including the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the National Lawyers Guild, the Congress of Arab American Organizations and the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners, among others.



Aiyana Stanley Jones

Detroit police hearing gives no details on killing of child

At a public meeting held on Aug. 5, the Board of Police Commissioners responded to a request by the Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality for an update on the Michigan State Police investigation into the killing of Aiyana Stanley Jones. Jones, a seven-year-old African-American school girl, was severely burned by a flash grenade and shot through the head by a white Detroit police officer on the night of May 16 while she lay in bed.

The killing sparked outrage throughout the country. There have been several demonstrations against the killing and the family of Jones has filed two wrongful death civil suits.

According to the police commission report, the investigation by the state police will be complete within four weeks, at which time the findings will be turned over to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. No details of the specific findings were reported at the police commission meeting on Aug. 5.

The Detroit police have been under two federal consent decrees since 2003. The consent decrees, involving the use of lethal force and the deplorable conditions existing at the time in the precinct lockups, stemmed from a three-year U.S. Justice Department investigation beginning in 2000.

Meanwhile, Detroit Police Chief Warren Evans was forced to resign in July by Mayor Dave Bing. Many speculated that the killing of Jones played a significant role in the removal of the chief, who had openly attacked the Coalition Against Police Brutality for its criticism of law-enforcement practices in the city.

U.S. Congress member John Conyers of Detroit recently wrote a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder requesting a federal investigation into the killing of the child. Conyers also spoke on the "Fighting for Justice" radio program on WDTW, reiterating his commitment to work to end police brutality in Detroit. □

ys

Job & shove it!' ... and gets avalanche of support

overhead luggage cover by one, responded in kind to the passenger who had verbally abused him. Over the intercom he is said to have thanked "those who have shown dignity and respect these last 20 years," and then stated, "I've had it," and left the plane via the emergency slide at Kennedy Airport in New York. With flair, Slater grabbed a beer or two on the way out.

A working-class James Bond could hardly have been more dramatic or to the point. He was arrested on several charges, but his story was just beginning.

Overwhelming public support

An "in-your-face" working-class folk hero was born, instantly. Within a day, tens of thousands of people declared themselves supporters of Slater on Facebook and other websites. Donations to cover his bail of \$2,500 and his legal defense poured in. For example, as of Aug.

15, over 268,000 people have responded to an MSN poll, the big majority voting Slater "a hero."

There were also 7,646 written comments that were overwhelmingly in his support. "He did what all of us want to do," was the most common response. It seemed as if every workplace was abuzz with opinions of what happened, most very favorable.

The big business press, normally hostile to any type of working-class protest, was forced to give national coverage — although articles critical of Slater began to crop up. No matter. Slater stated, "I think something about this resonated with people. I'm overwhelmed and very thankful." Slater's actions, and the avalanche of support he received, were no accidental affair. It was a response to the worsening conditions of all workers who serve the public — from flight attendants to transit workers, maids, custodians, nurses, wait

staff, retail workers and so on.

Business owners love to cut jobs and services and let the remaining workers bear the brunt of the extra work and a frustrated public. After all, the owners don't have to face the public. They just reap the benefits of their cutbacks and cry all the way to the bank when there are complaints about the consequences.

But the response to Slater's boldness showed a glimpse of the underlying resent-

ment that this exploitation has caused. Underneath it all is the latent belief that any worker has a right to his or her job, and the right not to be abused on that job. No worker should feel so desperate for their job that they have to put up with racism, sexism, anti-gay/lesbian comments, or any other nasty or condescending attitudes from the boss or the public in general.

Steven Slater's actions struck a blow for working people in all walks of life. □

LOW-WAGE CAPITALISM

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-Howard Zinn, author of

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Low-Wage Capitalism

Zimbabwe diamond sales defy U.S.-led sanctions

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Following a protracted political struggle waged by Zimbabwe and its allies against U.S., British and European Union imperialist efforts to ban its sale of diamonds, Zimbabwe sold the first group of diamonds from the Chiadzwa mines — 900,000 carats — on Aug. 11. The sales earned \$72 million in one day.

Government estimates are that at least \$1 billion can be earned every year through the sale of diamonds just from the Chiadzwa mines. That would increase state revenues by 50 percent and could fund many social service programs.

The southern African nation, which recently celebrated its 30th anniversary of national liberation, has been subjected to economic sanctions by the West since 2000, when the state supported the seizures of thousands of farms owned by British settlers — land that European settlers had seized by force from the African people during their colonial rule.

As part of this same process of preventing Zimbabwe from achieving economic control over its resources, the imperialist states and their supporters attempted to halt the country from marketing its diamond resources, estimated at approximately 25 percent of the world’s supply.

Zimbabwe had been accused of violating the so-called “Kimberley Process,” which was adopted during the 1990s, in part to curtail the use of stolen diamonds by the Western-backed UNITA rebel organization in Angola. UNITA had utilized the gems to finance its operations after the U.S. withdrew its open assistance. Today, the KP is being used to maintain imperialist control over the mining and marketing of diamonds.

Nonetheless, the government was cer-

tified to move forward in placing its diamonds on the market at a recent gathering of the World Diamond Council held in St. Petersburg, Russia. According to Zimbabwe Vice President John Nkomo, who spoke at a certification ceremony in the capital of Harare on Aug. 10, “Since the middle of last year, the country went through several stages in its quest to satisfy the KP minimum requirements.” (Zimbabwe Herald, Aug. 11)

“Diamonds are our heritage, a heritage which we should bequeath to our children and future generations. These diamonds should benefit the people of Zimbabwe and it is our shared and collective responsibility as Zimbabweans to guard this resource jealously.”

The Zimbabwe government views the vast reservoir of diamond resources as a mechanism to foster economic development. This new development has prompted discussions in Zimbabwe over the use of revenues garnered from the sale of diamonds and other natural resources, including gold, platinum, chrome, nickel and coal.

An editorial published in the Zimbabwe Herald on Aug. 11, entitled “Let’s Ensure Diamonds Benefit Nation,” states, “President Mugabe and Finance Minister Tendai Biti have made almost identical statements that the cash raised from the diamonds must go to the state, and must never be used to enrich individuals, even if these people are Zimbabweans.”

The \$1 billion yearly could be utilized, according to the editorial, to lift state employees out of poverty and begin to make tremendous contributions toward reconstructing public education and health-care. The newspaper adds, “In fact, the diamonds could replace the hoped-for foreign aid that never arrived, and do a bit more.”

Imperialists provoke Zimbabwe

A diplomatic row developed on Aug. 1 between Zimbabwe and the West — including the United States and the European Union — when their ambassadors walked out of a memorial service held in honor of President Mugabe’s sister, Sabina Mugabe, a former member of parliament and ZANU-PF Women’s League leader. In his address at the gathering of thousands of ZANU-PF supporters, Mugabe blasted the imperialist states for their continued efforts to destabilize Zimbabwe through sanctions and sabotage aimed at regime change.

Mugabe told the crowd at the National Heroes’ Acre, a burial ground for liberation movement fighters: “We are still being treated as if we don’t own this country. They want to tell us, do A, B and C of that, remove so-and-so and they are now saying Mugabe must go first. Whoever told them that their will is above that of the people of Zimbabwe?” (Reuters, Aug. 1)

The president echoed the sentiment of ZANU-PF: “We say to hell, hell with them. Sanctions must go, and they must go. They are hurting our people regardless of political affiliation.”

Despite the creation of a national coalition government with the Western-backed opposition Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and the smaller Movement for Democratic Change-Mutambara (MDC-M), the imperialists have maintained the blockade against Zimbabwe, and are financing the MDC-T exclusively. There are sharp divisions between ZANU-PF and the MDC-T over the demand by Mugabe’s party that the state must control at least 51 percent of all foreign-owned firms, including mines and banks.

There are also differences between

ZANU-PF and some nongovernmental organizations that are trying to control more than 26 percent of aid resources inside the country. “The government has clashed with some NGOS over the management of a \$478 million humanitarian aid package to be extended to Zimbabwe through a United Nations agency.” (Zimbabwe Sunday Mail, Aug. 8)

Regional support breaks Zimbabwe’s isolation

President Jacob Zuma of the Republic of South Africa pledged his continued support for Zimbabwe on the eve of the 30th anniversary summit of the regional Southern African Development Community held in Namibia on Aug. 16-17.

SADC was formed in 1980 in the aftermath of the independence of Zimbabwe, when both South Africa and Namibia were still under white-minority control by the racist apartheid regime then based in Pretoria. At present the SADC has 15 member countries in the southern African region.

Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba of the ruling South West Africa People’s Organization opened the SADC Summit, saying that SADC has an historic opportunity to accomplish poverty eradication, food security, job creation, gender equality and an end to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Meanwhile, President Mugabe visited the People’s Republic of China prior to the SADC Summit and announced that the socialist state would provide yet another aid package for Zimbabwe valued at \$15.2 million. The aid will consist of the establishment of a financial institution to facilitate trade, agricultural support and implementation of a framework for enacting previous agreements by the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation. □

Even CIA statistics show

Imperialist domination underdevelops Africa

By **Caleb T. Maupin**

The Central Intelligence Agency, a ruthless enforcer of Wall Street’s drive for profits, publishes “The World Factbook.” It gives updated statistics for every country, some of which measure quality of life and societal health, such as life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy, unemployment and industrial production. In this series, Workers World examines some surprising conclusions, all using the CIA’s own statistics. Even though these statistics often understate gains compared to United Nations figures, they can’t help but show that countries benefit by breaking with imperialism.

Constantly in the U.S. we are told that the solution for the people of Africa, who overwhelmingly live in extreme poverty, is for U.S. corporations and oil companies to invest there.

For a long time Marxists have struggled to expose this bit of supposed “common knowledge.” Walter Rodney wrote a ground-breaking work called “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa” that showed how Africa was impoverished and destroyed by Western domination and colonialism.

Kwame Nkrumah, the first president

of Ghana, wrote “Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism.” The book discussed how even though some governments in Africa and other impoverished parts of the world became politically “independent” from colonial masters, starting in the 1950s and 1960s, they are still dominated and controlled by Western capitalists and can still be subject to direct military repression.

The history of Africa is filled with examples of U.S. intervention against liberation movements. Washington backed the criminal apartheid regime of South Africa for many decades, until the 1990s. The U.S. also engineered the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first premier of the Congo after it won independence from Belgium. More recently, the U.S. has bombed and destabilized Somalia in the name of the “war on terror.”

The U.S. media has whipped up a frenzy of “moral outrage” about alleged “dictators” who are to blame for the economic woes of African people. Leaders who oppose the West such as Robert Mugabe and Muammar Qaddafi are portrayed as harming their people by getting in the way of Western capitalists.

But even the CIA’s own statistics show otherwise. The highest life expectancy in Africa — 77.47 years — is in Libya, where

Qaddafi leads the country with an ideology of “Islamic Socialism” and is consistently demonized by the U.S. propaganda machine.

Compare this to Libya’s neighbor, Egypt, a country not led by anti-imperialists or revolutionaries, where this same average is 72.40 years.

Nigeria, an oil-producing country like Libya, is another example of the “wonders” of Western imperialism. Nigeria’s government has long been a friend to U.S. and British corporations, such as Shell Oil. With friends of Shell holding the government rather than a popular anti-imperialist regime, Nigeria’s average life expectancy is only 47.24 years.

It is odd that Muammar Qaddafi’s regime has been labeled as having negative effects for the people of Libya, when people in that country live longer than those in any other African country. To the corporate media’s discredit, they publish or broadcast little of the negative impact of privatization in Egypt or Nigeria, yet will disseminate much about alleged evils of countries like Libya that refuse to become neo-colonies of Western capitalism.

Zimbabwe has long been demonized as a “dictatorship” and “economic disaster.” Such accusations against Zimbabwe are directed at the government of Robert Mugabe, who led the Zimbabwe African

National Union in wresting power from a regime composed of white settlers whose ancestors claimed the territory for the British Empire. Now the Mugabe government has angered the West by taking over and distributing to the African people the richest farmland, which had been held by the settler minority that still controlled the country’s resources. Literacy in Zimbabwe, led by its revolutionary nationalist government, is 90.7 percent, far above even the world average of 80 percent.

Uganda, where a U.S.-backed evangelical Christian who believes in free market capitalism holds the presidency, has only 66.8 percent literacy.

The Nigerian government, under tight control of U.S. oil corporations, has established only 68 percent literacy.

Zimbabwe’s life expectancy, though low, stands above Nigeria, Zambia and U.S.-occupied Afghanistan. Despite this fact, the corporate media never seem to report on the “economic disaster” of Western capitalist domination in Nigeria or Zambia, but focus on the problems of Zimbabwe. Add to this the problems caused Zimbabwe by U.S. and British sanctions and the maneuvers of Western bankers to destabilize the national currency, and you get the picture.

The CIA’s own statistics on quality of

Continued on page 7

Floods in Pakistan not ‘natural’

U.S. militarism’s role in the disaster

By Sara Flounders

Aug. 15 — The United Nations a week ago rated the floods in Pakistan as the greatest humanitarian crisis in recent history, with more people affected than by the Southeast Asian tsunami and the recent earthquakes in Kashmir and Haiti combined.

In the week since this Aug. 9 estimate, the number of people affected has doubled to more than 20 million left homeless and utterly destitute.

The floods will grow far worse in the coming week as record high waters move further downstream toward larger population centers in south Pakistan.

U.N. emergency relief coordinator John Holmes said the numbers would reach 40 to 50 million people in need of immediate assistance, out of a population of 170 million.

Millions of people are stranded without access to potable drinking water, basic food or shelter. Millions are on the move seeking higher ground or are packed onto the roofs of buildings or small hills on the wide floodplains of the Swat and Indus rivers.

Floodwaters cover all the cultivated land in Pakistan. Every major food and cash crop is lost. The agricultural heartland, the breadbasket of Pakistan, is wiped out.

Floodwaters have knocked out electricity and communication in large parts of the country.

Although this year there were record monsoon rains, this massive widespread flooding is no natural disaster. Angry commentators in Pakistan are calling it “a man-made catastrophe.”

The floods are not just an accident of nature. Dire warnings of the massive scope of this flood were predicted in late July, weeks in advance, when unusually heavy rain hit the upper reaches of the Swat River and the highlands in the north. It was the heaviest rain in 35 years.

Months before, flooding and heavy monsoon rains had been predicted. But even after 10 days of early floods had impacted 5 million people in a large area of the north, after the news media had given daily coverage of families clinging to tree branches, fields inundated and houses collapsing, no government organizations had even begun to prepare for emergencies or for the evacuation of large numbers of people.

This includes the Pakistani military, the dominant force in Pakistan.

An earthquake, whether in Haiti, China, Chile or Kashmir, usually strikes with

little warning. A tsunami prediction after an undersea earthquake gives people only a few hours’ notice. There might be just a few days’ notice that a hurricane or typhoon of great magnitude is brewing.

But the fact that massive floods would inundate vast areas downstream in Pakistan was known well in advance. Yet Pakistani officials took no steps to notify the population at risk or move emergency equipment into the region, from boats to portable bridges, potable water, emergency tents and medicines.

All the words of concern from humanitarian agencies are starting to pour forth. But so far the amount of aid reaching Pakistan from the U.S., NATO countries and U.N. agencies is among of the smallest ever for disaster relief.

Washington has promised \$55 million for emergency aid and the use of six helicopters. What an insult! Just this year Congress allocated to the Pentagon more than 1,000 times this paltry amount to continue to fight its wars in the region.

Partnership with U.S.

The disastrous floods that have inundated large parts of Pakistan are a graphic example of how Pakistan’s unequal, dependent relationship with the U.S. has left the country backward, distorted, totally unprepared and unable to deal with unusually heavy rainfall at a time of global climate change.

The alliance with the U.S. has been of absolutely no help in the country’s hour of greatest need. The corrupt feudal officials and even more corrupt repressive military, all kept in power by enormous amounts of U.S. military aid, have proved totally unable to even notify the millions of people who were clearly at risk or to move into place the most basic emergency equipment.

Washington is more than willing to sell Pakistan F-16 jets, hundreds of surface-to-air missiles and surveillance planes. This is enormously profitable to U.S. military contractors and Pakistan ends up ever further in debt.

Meanwhile, Pakistan today lacks the most basic flood control system. There is a total lack of investment funds or for-

Even in a time of global climate change, the immense suffering of the Pakistani people due to vast floods did not have to happen. Investment in infrastructure and a timely emergency response program could have minimized what has become one of the world’s worst disasters. But decades of U.S. intervention to keep corrupt and reactionary military regimes in power against the will of the people have left this country one of the poorest and least developed in the region.

eign aid for flood control. A basic system of dams, reservoirs, containment basins, embankments and levees could have contained the water and prevented out-of-control flooding in the vulnerable region.

Major rivers throughout the U.S., Europe, Japan and now China have well-organized flood control.

The lack of flood control in Pakistan has destroyed hundreds of miles of roads and railroad lines, bridges, schools, hospitals and electric generators. More than 6,000 villages have been swept away. Towns and now even cities are submerged.

For decades Washington has made generous funds available to Pakistan for police and intelligence agencies, but infrastructure development, education, health and other social needs have been neglected. Pakistan is more than \$40 billion in debt, much of it for U.S. military equipment.

According to figures of the United Nations Children’s Fund, even before the flood devastation 30 percent of Pakistani children were chronically malnourished; only half of the 19 million children of primary school age were enrolled in school; and two-thirds of the women are illiterate.

There has been a heavy presence of the Pakistani military in the Swat region and the Northwest Frontier Province, where the flooding began. But their role was entirely focused on the most brutal repression, not emergency relief.

Last summer, under enormous political pressure from the U.S., Pakistan’s military launched intensely destructive counterinsurgency campaigns against the Taliban in northern Pakistan, Bajaur, the Swat Valley and South Waziristan.

In the Swat Valley, which has many cities, the Pakistani military faced resistance from an urban population of 4 million people. Two million refugees were

forced to flee their homes during the battles there. Millions rushed for cover from the intense bombardment, yet the government had no relief plans for these desperate war refugees.

None of the U.S.-supplied heavy equipment in the region was used to build one bridge or one dam. It was used only to lay waste to the region.

The very Islamic organizations that have been able to provide emergency relief for the refugees, both then and now during the flooding, are what the U.S. and Pakistani military are trying to destroy.

As floodwaters were roaring on Aug. 14, U.S. drones struck again, killing at least 13 people in Pakistan’s North Waziristan district, close to the Afghan border.

U.S. and NATO forces are an overwhelming presence in Afghanistan, just across the border. Their technology is so sophisticated that the Pentagon can maneuver a pilotless drone from the other side of the planet and have it fire a missile into Afghanistan or Pakistan.

But it does not even take complicated technology to measure rainfall or communicate weather threats to millions of people. The equipment to do this has been around for decades.

However, this simple task appears to be impossible because the U.S., the most powerful of the exploiting capitalist countries, subverts popular governments while promoting those who collaborate with its system based on maximizing profit, where technology is at the service of imperialist military oppression.

To respond to natural and human-made emergencies, what is needed is the uprooting of this capitalist system of exploitation and national oppression so every country can establish planning to meet its people’s needs. □

Czech youth group protests U.S. military facility

The following statement was issued by the Communist Youth Union (KSM) of the Czech Republic on Aug. 3 regarding the Czech government’s intention to place a U.S. early-warning system in their country. It illustrates both the continuing aggressive role of the U.S. and NATO in Eastern Europe and the existence of progressive forces in that region that are resisting renewed imperialist domination. The translated statement has been edited for clarity.

The Communist Youth Union (KSM) sharply rejects the intention of the Czech Republic’s government to place on our territory a U.S. early-warning system component — a center to collect and process the system’s data.

Approximately 70 percent of the citizens have rejected the government’s intention to place another component of the mentioned system — a U.S. military radar — in the Czech Republic. Some 200,000 of them expressed their resis-

tance with their signatures under the KSM petition along with tens of thousands of signatures under the petitions of other initiatives. After all this, the government of the Czech Republic still continued secret negotiations on the placement of the U.S. military facility on our territory behind the public’s back.

The ruling forces intend to carry out this important act without allowing any expression of the people’s will and without discussion in the Czech Republic’s Parliament. Any attempt to cover up this agreement by bringing up its eventual possible connection with NATO (and not just a Czech-U.S. deal) is completely without merit and misleading. It is clearly based on a bilateral agreement between the U.S. and Czech governments. ...

The right-wing parties as well as the Czech social democratic party demonstrate whom they really serve with their pro-U.S., servile and yea-saying attitudes. They perform as a gear trans-

mitting the interests of the imperialist structures — the U.S. government, its criminal instrument NATO, as well as the European Union.

It is domestic and foreign capitalists and not working people who possess real power in our country. During the capitalist economic crisis, these forces on one hand further intensify the class struggle against the working and unemployed people through the painful cutting of their social and legal position; they simultaneously have full responsibility for the policy of aggression and occupation concerning deployment of Czech army mercenaries and military equipment, especially in occupied Kosovo and Afghanistan.

The Communist Youth Union (KSM) carries on its struggle against the placement of the U.S. military facility on our territory and for leading our country out from under the imperialist yoke of the U.S., NATO and the EU. □

life in Africa overwhelmingly show that capitalist domination and imperialism are not “saving” the African people. The regimes in countries such as Nigeria, Egypt and Zambia, which are dominated and controlled by Western corporations, generally have a much lower quality of life than those that fight imperialism and seek to build an independent government.

Contrary to what is largely believed in the United States, people in Africa benefit most from carving out their own destiny and removing the power of Western corporations and banks. Investment by imperialists is no help to the people of that continent; it is done purely to exploit the labor and resources that should belong to the African people. Claims that imperialism brings “development” are as phony as the past claims by the slave-traders that they were “helping to civilize” African people by placing them in bondage.

More to come.

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MO FOTO: BERTA JOUBERT-CECI

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

Manifestando los sonidos de su amado Puerto Rico, cientos de personas cantando plenas y coreando consignas sobre su valiente carácter acompañaron a la luchadora independentista Lolita Lebrón a su lugar final de descanso en el Cementerio del Viejo San Juan. Fue enterrada cerca de su querido Maestro, Don Pedro Albizu Campos. Como lo había solicitado, el entierro tuvo lugar a poco más de 24 horas después de su muerte.

“Lolita Lebrón, ejemplo de valor” y “Se siente, se siente, Lolita está presente” coreaban sobre todo las mujeres quienes en varias ocasiones cargaron el féretro tomándolo de los brazos de los hombres que lo llevaban.

No sólo puertorriqueños/as de diversos partidos y organizaciones a favor de la independencia asistieron, sino que personas de todas las afiliaciones políticas fueron a honrar a Lolita. La amplitud del apoyo atestiguaba su naturaleza humana y su llamado incesante a la unidad para defender la identidad puertorriqueña. Ella hizo amistades fuera de líneas partidistas.

Lolita era tan feroz defendiendo la independencia como humilde en la apreciación de todos/as quienes lucharan por los valores puertorriqueños. Un ejemplo fue su amistad con Norma Burgos, senadora partidaria de la estadidad, presente en el funeral, que compartió la cárcel con Lebrón por oponerse a la ocupación de la isla de Vieques que se utilizaba para ejercicios de bombardeo por la Marina estadounidense.

La muerte de Lolita inmediatamente despertó un incesante fluir de conmovedores mensajes, poemas, videos y canciones a través del Internet. Tanto los periódicos alternativos como la prensa corporativa publicaron obituarios, incluyendo un artículo en el Washington Post que hablaba en nombre de la clase dominante de la ciudad donde Lebrón fue detenida en 1954. El escrito del Post comparó a Lolita con los revolucionarios Che Guevara y Pancho Villa. La comunidad internacional, especialmente cubanos/as y nicaragienses, enviaron muchos mensajes.

La vida de Lolita Lebrón, tanto personal como política, representa la historia de Puerto Rico durante la consolidación de la dominación colonial estadounidense de la isla y la lucha contra dicha dominación. Lebrón nació el 19 de noviembre de 1919 en la ciudad de Lares, donde en 1898 el pueblo se levantó contra la dominación española en lo que se conoce como el Grito de Lares.

El evento denominado “la Masacre de Ponce”, marcó la adolescencia de Lolita. El domingo de ramos, 27 de marzo de 1937, la policía colonial rodeó una manifestación pacífica de miembros/as del Partido Nacionalista en la ciudad de Ponce. Bajo las órdenes directas del gobernador estadounidense Blanton Winship, la policía abrió fuego matando a 22 personas desarmadas e hiriendo a 200.

En 1941, dejando a su hija bajo el cuidado de su madre, Lolita salió de Puerto Rico hacia Nueva York. Al igual que miles de puertorriqueños/as en la década de 1940, buscó un trabajo que fuera mejor que la existencia inestable que enfrentaban los/as pobres en la isla. Trabajó en la industria de la aguja y se unió

LOLITA LEBRÓN, ejemplo de valor y sacrificio



1954, Washington, D.C.

oficialmente al Partido Nacionalista en Nueva York, convirtiéndose en una líderesa importante. Lebrón fue encarcelada por un breve período junto a otros nacionalistas después de las manifestaciones frente a la ONU contra el estatus de “Estado Libre Asociado” que EEUU impuso sobre Puerto Rico en 1952.

En 1954 el líder nacionalista Don Pedro Albizu Campos sugirió una acción en Washington, DC, para llamar

la atención internacional al estatus de la isla. El año anterior, el gobierno de EEUU había convencido a la ONU que aprobara una resolución que quitaba a Puerto Rico de la lista de territorios coloniales. Esta resolución permitió a los EEUU retener información sobre Puerto Rico a la ONU, allanando el camino para la intensificación de la explotación de la isla.

El 1 de marzo de 1954, Lebrón dirigió la operación en la Cámara de Representantes con los camaradas nacionalistas Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irving Flores y Andrés Figueroa Cordero. Al grito de “Viva Puerto Rico libre” y desplegando una bandera de Puerto Rico, ella fue la primera en disparar — hacia el techo.

Salvo Flores, que logró escapar, Lolita y los demás fueron detenidos de inmediato. Cientos de nacionalistas fueron arrestados bajo “detención preventiva” en Nueva York, Chicago, Washington y en todo Puerto Rico, incluyendo a Albizu Campos. Lebrón fue condenada a 56 años de prisión y el resto a 81 años por “asalto con un arma”.

En 1979, después de una gran presión — particularmente del Comité para la liberación de Presos/as Políticos Puertorriqueños — El presidente Jimmy Carter les perdonó, junto al nacionalista Oscar Collazo que había sido encarcelado desde 1950 por el ataque a la Casa Blair. Todos fueron liberados incondicionalmente. Figueroa Cordero había sido liberado en 1978 por motivos de salud.

En una entrevista del 4 de agosto con el semanario puertorriqueño Claridad, Cancel Miranda recuerda el valor de Lolita: “ella subió esas escalinatas y yo vi a esa mujer y no me canso de decirlo, que llevaba no sólo la bandera nuestra, llevaba la dignidad nuestra por esas escalinatas ... Ahí iba esta mujer puertorriqueña, lareña, subiendo esas escaleras segura de que iba a morir. Porque ella a lo que fue, fue a dar la vida”.

Una vez libre, Lolita continuó sin descanso en la lucha para liberar a su patria: haciendo giras dando conferencias, escribiendo poesía, pero sobre todo uniéndose al pueblo en manifestaciones en Puerto Rico. Ella fue una figura visible en la lucha contra la presencia de la Marina en Vieques y fue detenida a los 81 años por adentrarse en el campo restringido de tiro.

A pesar del gran sufrimiento durante su encarcelamiento en prisiones federales en los EEUU donde fue maltratada y cruelmente torturada mentalmente, junto con sus pérdidas personales — su hijo y posteriormente su hija murieron mientras ella estaba encarcelada — Lolita mantuvo su inquebrantable compromiso con la lucha por la independencia. Sus contribuciones son muchas — escritos, poemas, pero, sobre todo, su trabajo asegurando que las mujeres sean participantes activas y líderes en la lucha. Ella es ejemplo del famoso pronunciamiento de Albizu Campos: “La Patria es Valor y Sacrificio”.

Lolita Lebrón, ¡Presente! ¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre! □

EDITORIAL:

¿Qué recuperación? El tiempo es para luchar

El reporte más reciente sobre los empleos y las cifras de crecimiento económico confirman que no habrá una recuperación para la clase trabajadora. Al contrario, el desempleo masivo probablemente va a empeorar, no a mejorar. La “recuperación sin empleos” está en decadencia después de menos de un año, y luego de un declive económico por 19 meses.

Los/as líderes de la clase trabajadora deben enfrentarse con esta verdad y formular un programa de lucha. No hay otro camino para aliviar la calamidad del desempleo y las penurias crecientes que han resultado de la crisis económica.

En julio, el último mes de la llamada “recuperación”, las cifras oficiales del gobierno mostraron una pérdida neta de 131.000 empleos. El sector privado, según el gobierno, creó 91.000 empleos. Pero esto quedó opacado por la pérdida de 202.000 empleos gubernamentales a nivel federal, estatal y local.

El desempleo total oficial es 9,5 por ciento. La situación es peor para los/as trabajadores/as oprimidos/as. El desempleo de los/as trabajadores/as negros/as y latinos/as es de 15,6 por ciento y 12,1 por ciento, respectivamente.

El desempleo total oficialmente, incluyendo a los/as trabajadores/as forzados/as a trabajar a tiempo parcial y los/as trabajadores/as que han dejado de buscar trabajo, es de 16,5 por ciento, o 25,8 millones. Esta cifra es mínima. ¡Hay que recordar que toma entre 150.000 a 200.000 empleos, solamente para detener el crecimiento del desempleo!

Además, la tendencia de la economía está en declive. La economía aumentó solamente un 2,1 por ciento en el último trimestre. Éste es un descenso de su máximo punto a finales de 2009, que fue 5,5 por ciento. El crecimiento económico ha estado en constante caída desde entonces. El capitalismo es un sistema inestable. Debe expandirse o contraerse. La escasa fase expansionista está por terminar.

El paquete de estímulo de \$787 mil millones, los miles de millones entregados a la industria automotriz, el programa de efectivo por carros viejos, las exenciones especiales de impuestos para compradores de casas, sin mencionar los billones (millones de millones) de dólares entregados a los bancos, todas estas medidas han fracasado en estimular el capitalismo estadounidense. Y los patrones están en huelga de no emplear. Están sentados sobre \$1,8 billones en efectivo. Han arrebatado \$1,2 trillones en ganancias basadas en el recorte brutal de la fuerza laboral.

Como Workers World/Mundo Obrero escribió el 17 de junio: “Ésta es una recuperación insólita, estimulada por los gastos del gobierno capitalista que a la suma, equivale a imprimir dinero. Pero aún en esta etapa temprana de recuperación, ya está mostrando debilidad e inestabilidad. Si los enormes problemas que ya existen de desempleo y recortes presupuestarios no son lo suficiente para alertar a los/as líderes de la clase trabajadora, estas recientes cifras económicas lo deberían hacer”.

Este es hoy aún más cierto.

Los/as trabajadores/as no pueden permitirse el lujo de no reconocer esto. Hay una necesidad urgente de movilización masiva para empezar las luchas para empleos, terminar los despidos, reabrir los lugares de trabajo y sobre todo, para conseguir un programa del gobierno al estilo de la Administración de Progreso del Trabajo para proveer empleos a sueldos sostenibles con beneficios para las millones de personas que no tienen trabajo o que están subempleadas.

Esperar a que los patrones den trabajo, o reducir sus impuestos con la esperanza de que vayan a abrir puestos de trabajo, es un callejón sin salida. Lo único que va a llamar la atención de los patrones y banqueros y su gobierno en Washington, es combatiendo el racismo y movilizándose para lograr acciones unidas, para luchar y sacudir este sistema y no permitir que todo siga como siempre, hasta que los/as trabajadores/as recuperen sus empleos, la gente tenga otra vez sus casas, y estén restaurados todos los servicios.

El tiempo para esa lucha es ahora. □